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REVIEW ARTICLE

Loyalty and Honor of Pashtun Women in Pashtu Landai: A Folkloric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Landai ([lʌnˈḍi]) is a Pashtu folkloric poetic genre composed of two lines with a total of 22 syllables: the first line has 9 syllables and the second line has 13. This paper explores how Landai poetry reflects the values of loyalty and honor among Pashtun girls and women. Using a descriptive-analytical method, selected Landais were analyzed to understand the psychological and cultural values embedded in them. The study finds that Landais serve as a powerful medium for Pashtun women to express their unwavering loyalty and commitment to preserving dignity in a patriarchal society where their voices are often suppressed in written literature. To learn more about Pashtun women poets, academics can go into Pashtu folklore. Because women could face persecution for writing poetry in Pashtun society, much folkloric poetry was created anonymously by female speakers, thus the focus is Landai under two major topics: Loyalty and Honor. Landai is the best piece of literature to explore Pashtun women discourse.

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Introduction

The Pashtun society places high value on moral traits such as keeping promises and preserving dignity. This paper investigates the representation of such values in Landai poetry. While written literature often silences female voices, Landais offer a medium through which Pashtun women can communicate their personal feelings and experiences anonymously and powerfully. Literature constantly discloses about a society because of the issues covered in different genres, and reading about a civilization is encouraged to learn about it. Many writers believe that poetry and other literary genres communicate much human feeling, but when it comes to Pashto literature, we cannot ignore the reality that women in Pashtun society are silenced. Researchers claim that Pashtun women can only express their anguish by crying, committing suicide, or, sometimes fleeing the house because it is hard for them to convey their pain, misery, or any other feelings.

To learn more about Pashtun women poets, academics can go into Pashtu folklore. Because women could face persecution for writing poetry in Pashtun society, much folkloric poetry was created anonymously by female speakers. The New York Times has reported on numerous young girls who set themselves on fire after being found reciting poetry to an FM radio at home (Griswold, 2012). In the same way, several Landay were published in the collection of Poetry Magazine, which the publishers believe is the best place to hear Pashtun women. On the other hand, it is well-known in Afghanistan, and we learn about women's current concerns in their Landay collection, which includes: peace, social injustice, forced marriages, education, political instability, moral man, poverty, and national unity. Writers are correct when they say that Tapa or Landay (a two-verse poetry) is an ancient

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style of poetry that is still in existence because its author is unknown, but has a female speaker for us to understand it. The Poetry Magazine speaks about the following poems which are two lines only with the writer anonymous.

My dear father! You sold me to an old man
I am your child, may Allah ruin you
(Magazine, 2018)

Poetry Magazine's compilation of the aforementioned poem raises a number of issues. "Its themes: war — jang; a woman's pride in her lover's courage and in his willingness to sacrifice himself for the homeland — watan; love — meena; separation — biltoon; grief — gham, are the five most common currents that run through these poems" . The poetry writing tattoo in this poem, which was common for Pashtun women to get to avoid unwanted glances, was given more information. The journal claims that because tattooing is considered superstitious and un-Islamic, it is far less common among young females today. However, these rough-hewn rings, moons, and flowers embellish the features of older Pashtun women: living artifacts from an other era (Magazine, 2018). As previously stated, Landay is poetry sung largely by women, so I would like to provide some samples based on the following categories. In any event, writers understood that the roles of women in Pashto literature may be discovered in folklore and that women can help ancient poems survive for thousands of years.

Pashtun women often conform to traditional norms and are underrepresented in written poetry. Landais, however, allow them to express their emotions freely. Despite the richness of this genre, little research has been conducted on the theme of female loyalty and honor in Landais. This paper seeks to fill this gap.

Methodology

This is a library-based, descriptive-analytical study. Primary sources include published Pashto books containing Landais. The study identifies and analyzes Landais that reflect themes of loyalty and dignity, exploring the psychological and social implications. Books and articles on Pashtu literature and Landai were consulted alongside with anthologies of Landais by renowned poets and folklorists. Relevant Landais were collected and divided them based on thematic categorization to explore two topics: loyalty and dignity.

Result & Discussion

Loyalty and Preserving Dignity

Loyalty is rooted in truthfulness, sacrifice, and devotion. It entails a steadfast commitment to the core principles of friendship and the fulfillment of its obligations. In contrast, betrayal and the violation of these principles undermine the very essence of loyalty.

Dignity encompasses honor, respect, and esteem; its opposites are dishonor, disrespect, and insult. Among the Pashtuns, upholding promises and preserving personal and communal dignity are considered virtuous deeds. They hold the dignity of others in the same regard as their own, placing great value on mutual respect and honor.

ته په سفر کې خفه مه شې
وعده مې داده ستا په پټ به ناسته يمه
(Shaheen, 1984, 171)

Here, the lover reassures her beloved of her loyalty and commitment to preserving his dignity. She promises to remain faithful and to safeguard his honor. She then urges him to set his worries aside, encouraging him to travel with confidence, assuring him with a firm and heartfelt promise.

جانانه څه په مخ دې شه شه
زه پښتنه يم ستا په پټ به ناسته يمه
(Gharibyar Kamawal, 2006, 68)

In this *landai*, a Pashtun lover reassures her beloved with confidence and pride. She tells him not to worry about her, for she is a Pashtun girl—and a Pashtun girl upholds her dignity. Dishonor and disloyalty have no place in her values, as they are contrary to the very fabric of Pashtun culture and tradition. Loyalty and the preservation of honor are deeply embedded in the constitution, customs, and way of life of the Pashtun people.

She questions how she could possibly betray these sacred traditions, violate her principles, or stray from the moral path defined by her identity. With this conviction, she urges her beloved to begin his journey with confidence, assuring him that she entrusts him to the care of Almighty Allah. She prays for his protection and safety.

By using the word *Pashtana* (Pashtun girl), the lover symbolically embodies the core values of the Pashtun community—its customs, loyalty, and commitment to honor. In a single word, she conveys the essence of *Pashtunwali* and communicates it to her beloved, seeking his understanding and trust.

په پټ پالې مسلی يارکا
بې پته يارکه شهزاده وي ورک دې شينه
(Shaheen, 1984 , 209)

په پت کې تور مسلی ښه دی
بې پته یار که شهزاده وي څه یې کومه
(Esmati Wardak, 1990, 95)

Here, we hear the voice of a courageous and dignified lover expressing disdain and contempt for a dishonorable beloved. She declares that a beloved who lacks honor is worthless, even if he is a prince—she does not desire him. To her, a man without honor holds less value than a humble but noble lover—someone with integrity, someone worthy of companionship and love. She curses the dishonorable prince, rejects his presence, and wishes for his downfall.

In the *landais* above, honor is symbolically represented through two contrasting words: *masalī* (the poor) and *shahzāda* (prince). *Masalī* symbolizes humility, helplessness, and external unattractiveness, while *shahzāda* represents wealth and high social status. The use of these symbolic figures allows the listener to quickly grasp the deeper message—honor and character outweigh wealth and prestige in matters of love and respect.

زه دې داخپله ځواني وخورم
که به دا ستا مینه پر بل باندې کومه
(Benawa, 2008, 31)

In this verse, the Pashtun lover affirms her unwavering loyalty, sincerity, and purity toward her beloved. She solemnly swears that she will never turn to another. Should she ever betray her beloved or love someone else, she prays that Almighty Allah take her life and bring her existence to an end, considering such disloyalty unworthy of life itself.

زما د لرې وطن یاره
رنګ مې دې هېر دی په نامه دې ناسته یمه
(Benawa, 2008, 88)

مسافري دې ډېره وکړه
رنګ مې هېردی په نامه دې نامه یادونه
(Ahmadzai, 2016, 97)

The *landai* above reflects the deep longing of a Pashtun lover who has been separated from her beloved for many years in a distant land. Though the time apart has been so long that she can no longer recall his face, her love and longing remain undiminished. She spends her days and nights consumed by thoughts of him. In his absence, the voice captured in this verse expresses her unwavering loyalty and steadfast commitment to honor.

زما پر سر دې خاورې واوړې
چې جانان نه شته ژوندی ځله ناسته یمه
(Popal, 2017, 133)

The Pashtun lover then declares: if her true beloved is not by her side, she will not live with another—nor does she desire to. For her, it would be better to die than to accept someone else as a life partner. Her heart belongs solely to her true love, and she refuses to give that place to anyone else.

یامې د یار سره یاري کړې
یا مې د عمر پاڼه ژېړه کړې چې مرمه
(Layeq, 1982, 490)

In the *landai* above, the Pashtun lover pleads with Almighty Allah to grant her the companionship of her beloved and to reunite them, ending their long separation. If this is not to be, she prays that Allah take her life, for death would be a release from her suffering.

These landais make it clear that the lover has suffered greatly due to the separation from her beloved, but she has never tasted the sweetness of union and is now yearning for death due to the hopelessness and despair caused by the separation. Yet, she does not seek another lover; she wants only her true beloved and no one else. This demonstrates her sincerity, pure love, and unwavering loyalty.

لاس به دې غاړې ته پرې نه ږدم
زه مسافر آشنا په خدای سپارلي یمه
(Shaheen, 1984, 571)

لاس به دې ځان وته پرې نه ږدم
د مسافر آشنا په پت ولاړه یمه
(Shaheen, 1984, 571)

The Pashtun lover further addresses her beloved, saying, "You have no permission to come near me, and I will not allow your hand to touch mine—such a thing will never happen." When her beloved was about to embark on a journey, she entrusted him to Allah, placing her trust in Him as her protector. She stands firm in her commitment to the dignity, honor, and pride of her beloved, unwilling to betray him. Her desire is to remain loyal and devoted, dedicated to safeguarding his honor.

دا د اشرافو نجونو کار دی
د پردیسي آشنا په پت کې ناستې وینه
(Shaheen, 1984, 278)

The voice of a proud Pashtun lover rises, proudly declaring her unwavering loyalty and honor. She asserts that this is the work of noble women, emphasizing that not everyone is capable of preserving honor and staying true to a beloved who is on a journey. She further claims that only a noble woman can remain loyal, and that such devotion is not the work of ordinary people. This distinction highlights the difference between material wealth and true nobility. In Pashtun culture, true nobility is associated with piety, high moral character, and adherence to the principles of honor and loyalty.

It is important to note that in materialistic societies, nobility is often defined by inherited wealth and property, where individuals may be rich yet morally weak. However, in Islamic societies, especially within Pashtun culture, nobility is not measured by financial status but by piety, honesty, and virtuous behavior. The truly noble are those who uphold high moral standards, regardless of their financial circumstances. In this context, the term "noble" reflects loyalty, respect, and honor.

د تورې وار را باندې وکه
راله را نه کړې د بې پتو پېغورونه
(Shaheen, 2016, 303)

د توپک ډز را باندې وکړه
خو چې رانه کړې د بې پتو پېغورونه
(Shaheen, 2016, 304)

In Pashtun society, dishonor and shame are met with intense disdain, and anyone who is dishonored is believed to be better off dead than to live with such disgrace. The shame of dishonor is seen as more painful than the sharpest sword. The lover, in her despair, pleads for either death by a gunshot or to be killed with the sharpest blade—anything, so long as she is not burdened with the stain of disgrace or dishonor. The *landai* above serves as powerful evidence of the loyalty and dignity she strives to maintain for her beloved.

جانانه ولې بې وفا شوې
ما دې په سر باندې اخيستې تهمتونه
(Shaheen, 2016, 195)

حلالول مې مناسب دي
چې آشنايي د بې وفا سره کومه
(Gharibyar Kamwawal, 2007, 88)

A Pashtun lover then laments to her beloved, questioning why he has been disloyal to her. She expresses that she has endured every hardship, insult, and pain in the name of love for him. She has accepted the criticisms of the world, endured slander, and remained steadfast in her loyalty, yet he has betrayed her.

In a moment of deep self-reflection, she places the blame on herself, asking why she ever loved someone capable of such disloyalty. She considers herself guilty for placing her trust in someone unworthy and believes she should be punished for it, even going so far as to say that she deserves to die for having been involved with such a person. In her mind, those who loved the disloyal should be condemned to death.

د بې وفا جانان د لاسه
تلې مې سوزي په غرمو ولاړه يمه
(Shaheen, 2016, 298)

In the *landai* above, the lover compares the pain caused by her beloved's betrayal to the scorching heat of the summer sun. The intense heat burns the sand, turning it red, and anyone who walks upon it barefoot will be seared by its sting. This symbolic comparison reflects how the betrayal of her beloved burns and torments her, causing her immense pain and suffering. She wishes for others to understand the deep anguish of disloyalty, recognizing that the cruelty of betrayal inflicts pain and suffering upon those who endure it.

زه دې د زړه په رنځ اخته کړم
بې وفا ياره د دارو په طمعه يمه
(Shaheen, 2016, 441)

In the *landai* above, the lover says, "I have been afflicted with heartache, and I am in search of a remedy, but I cannot heal without my beloved." The heartache described here symbolizes the deep emotional pain and suffering the lover endures. The remedy she seeks is the return and presence of her beloved, as she believes that only a reunion with him can cure her grief.

د خدای د پاره وفا دار شه
ډېره جفا د صادق مينه کموينه
(Shaheen, 2016, 310)

In the *landai* above, the lover speaks to her unfaithful partner, urging him to abandon his betrayal, as his actions have caused her deep pain and created a rift in her love. She implores him to be faithful and stop inflicting further hurt upon her. For the sake of God, she pleads with him to renounce his disloyalty and return to the path of loyalty.

په هندوستان خوشحاله ګرځه
زه به دا توري سترګې ستا په نام ساتمه
(Shaheen, 2016, 154)

In the *landai* above, the ideals of honor, purity, and chastity in Pashtun girls are vividly depicted, reflecting the reality of their lives. The lover speaks to her beloved, saying: "You travel to India without worry or concern. I will keep my dark, beautiful eyes and my beauty for you. I will preserve your honor and modesty in your name, and these eyes will never gaze upon another. As long as I live, I will remain devoted to your honor, your dignity, and your name."

تاخو کړه خپله وعده ماته
زه به په خپله وعده ټینګ ولاړه یمه
(Shaheen, 2016, 160)

In the *landai* above, we see that the Pashtun lover remains steadfast despite her beloved's unfaithfulness, holding firmly to her promise. This reflects the strong resolve, determination, and unwavering loyalty of Pashtun lovers, serving as a clear testament to their commitment and devotion.

سبامې ستا په تهمت وژني
ځای د راستی دی، چې منکر نه شې مینه
(Rafi, 2013, 36)

A lover addresses her beloved, saying, "I may be killed tomorrow for your love, and I am ready to sacrifice myself in the name of that love. But be careful not to deny our love. Do not let fear or terror lead you to speak lies in place of the truth. If we are to be killed, it doesn't matter. What matters is that our love remains pure, rooted in honesty and truth, and that people recognize it for what it truly is—genuine love, not deceit, trickery, or mere desire."

انکار د مینې دې کړی نه شم
که مې منصور غوندې څوک دار ته جګوینه
(Mangal, 2010, 37)

The *landai* above alludes to the death of Hassan ibn Mansur, famously known as Mansur al-Hallaj, one of the great Sufis and spiritual figures of his time. He was executed by the Abbasid Caliphate. In the *landai*, love symbolically references the execution of Mansur al-Hallaj, with the lover saying, "Just as Mansur was hanged for his Sufi beliefs and sacrificed himself for his faith, I too will sacrifice myself for my love and will never turn away from it."

سترګې مې تاته تورولې
ته چې رانغلې په سالو مې پاکولې
(Azmoon, 2012, 85)

She tells her beloved the condition of her heart, saying, "I was sitting waiting for you, thinking you would come. I adorned myself for you and darkened my eyes, but when you didn't come, I ended up cleaning them up again with scarf."

په ژبه هېڅ ویلی نه شم
پټې سلګۍ دې په دیدن پسې وهمه
(Mangal, 2014, 332)

Pashto has two meanings: First, it refers to the language of the Pashtun people. Second, it embodies a code and standard of Pashtun national life, representing dignity, honor, pride, courage, and elevation. Pashtuns are measured by this standard. In Pashto culture, virtues such as bravery, heroism, hospitality, revenge, generosity, forgiveness, independence, willpower, honor, friendship, honesty, truthfulness, indifference to personal gain, selflessness, sacrifice, and other noble human qualities are highly esteemed. If a Pashtun lacks any of these traits, they are said to be "without Pashto" or "not a true Pashtun." Conversely, someone who possesses all these virtues is described as "a very strong Pashtun" or "a very noble Pashtun," holding the highest moral standards.

In the *landai* above, this spirit is reflected. It embodies the concept of honor, dignity, and modesty in Pashtunwali, where a person endures pain and suffering silently, without complaint or sigh. Yet, deep down, they suppress their tears, quietly longing for a glimpse of their beloved.

په مټیز توب درسره نه ځم
په پاکه مینه درسره یم خو چې یمه
(Olfat, 2007, 262)

A lover says to her beloved: "My love for you will last forever, and there will never be a shortage in my love for you. No other love will find its way into my heart without you. However, I will not trample on my honor and dignity, and I will never run away with you."

زما په پت کې ژوند په کار دی
بې پته ژوند د تخت په سر نه قبلومه
(Popal, 2019, 134)

"Then, the Pashtun love says to its beloved: 'A life is worth living only with honor and dignity. A life that lacks honor and dignity, even if it is the life of a king, is of no use to me, and I do not desire it.'"

د کوټې تير راباندې پروت وای
راباندې نه وای د بې ننګ سړي لاسونه
(Olfat, 2016, 261)

پت گر په سرو وينو کې خوښ يم
تل په بې پتو د جهان وي تهمتونه
(Esmati Wardak, 1992, 83)

A Pashtun lover is repulsed by an unworthy and dishonorable lover. She expresses her disdain, saying: "I would have preferred the ruins of a house to fall on me, but I would never want the touch of an unworthy and dishonorable man. I would rather have the house collapse on me, leaving me buried under its debris, dying, than live a life with such a dishonorable person by my side.

I would rather lie in the dirt, my body drenched in blood, than endure a life with someone unworthy at my side. People always speak ill of those without honor, mock them, and they are despised by others."

په هندوستان دې ځلي جوړ شه
د بې ننګی آواز دې رامشه مينه
(Khalil, (nd), 201)

A lover speaks to her beloved, who is on a journey, saying: "Instead of returning home or to your country in disgrace and shame, it is far better that you die in India with honor, dignity, and respect, and never return."

د بې وفا جانان د لاسه
ځيرې گرېوان به په محشر ولاړه يمه
(Ahmadzai, 2016, 106)

In the *landai* above, the voice of a Pashtun lover rises from her lips. She speaks to her beloved, warning him that on the Day of Judgment, she will stand before Allah (SWT) with her face and neck exposed, bearing the consequences of his actions. She will present her case to Allah (SWT). Therefore, she urges him not to commit any injustice or cause harm, and to fear Allah (SWT).

The analysis shows that Landais provide rare insights into the private emotional lives of Pashtun women. The poetic voice, though anonymous, carries strong messages of personal ethics and social ideals. Landais counter the notion that Pashtun women are passive or voiceless. Instead, they emerge as active preservers of tradition, capable of profound emotional expression. Women poets are open about their views and thoughts describing their every concerns. Some of the poems are written to describe the nature of the woman via female speaker of them. For instance, I am unread book, a poem by Ulfat Begum. Women poets are critical of Pashtun society. To some extent they spoke about their thoughts and concerns but other times restrained themselves complaining that women cannot talk about everything because some of the issues are too private. In the following piece of poem, the plural pronoun (we) is to speak on behalf of women saying that they cannot express themselves openly (Sadaat, 2013).

Conclusion

Through their poems, women poets have cultivated their social and political discourse. They advocate for human rights, tolerance, prosperity, happiness, eradicating poverty, marriage/Nikah, property inheritance, patriotism, peace and political stability, education, and national unity. They also desire justice for both the victim and the abuser in the event of a legal infringement. Women poets are conscious of the political climate in their countries and areas. Regarding a certain subject, they are never passive and are quite explicit about their opinions. Aside from their political and rights knowledge in the context of Islam, as well as their social and cultural issues, women poets also adore males and request marriage, or Nikah.

Pashtun women, through Landai poetry, express powerful sentiments of loyalty and honor. These short verses convey their emotional world and cultural values more authentically than most written texts. The commitment to dignity—even at the cost of life—is a recurring theme. This study reveals the intellectual and spiritual richness of these women, often overlooked in mainstream literature.

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